



STETSON UNIVERSITY

Department of Psychology

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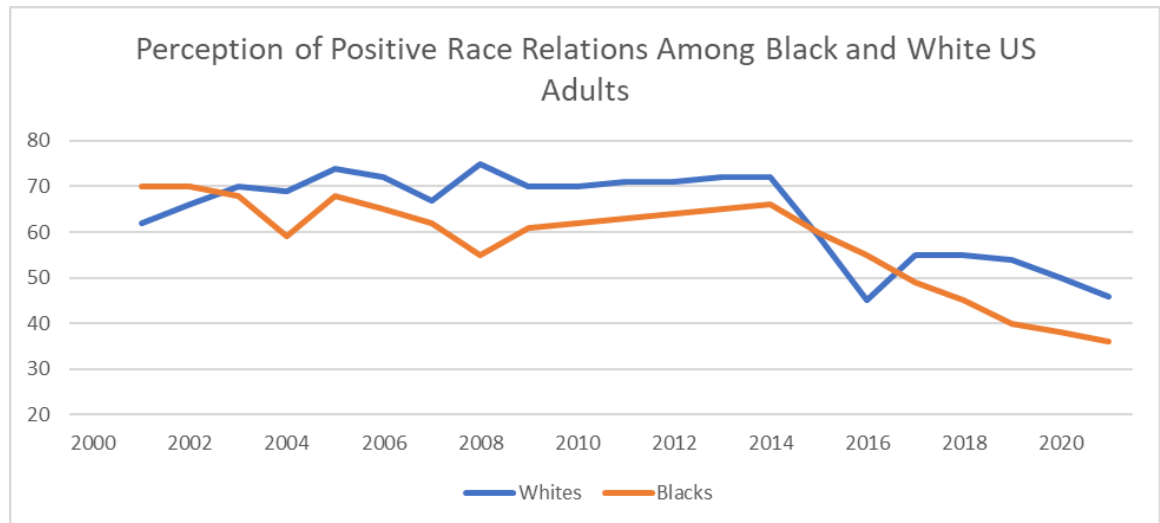
Dear International Development Committee:

I am writing this letter in response to the request for written evidence related to the inquiry on the philosophy and culture of aid: racism in the aid sector. I write this letter in the spirit of both supporting efforts which will reduce racism and racial tensions in the UK, US and elsewhere while also expressing concern that some efforts labeled “antiracist” are untested, demonstrated not to work, or may increase racism, identitarianism or worsen race relations. I note also that I write this letter only on behalf of myself and am in no way representing my university or department.

I am a licensed clinical psychologist and professor of psychology in the United States. For two decades, I have studied aggression and violence, including how media of various sorts may nor may not influence such behaviors. More recently, I have become interested in race relations in the United States, particularly regarding a precipitous decline in race relations that began in approximately 2014 and how this may be understood.

At the outset I want to highlight my support for evidence-based diversity programs and the need to confront racism where it occurs. Working toward a society where no one is judged based on their ethnicity, sex or gender, sexual orientation, religion, or other identity characteristics is a laudable and important goal.

In some early work, still under review, my data suggests that race relations are worsening, not because practical realities are worsening, but at very least are correlated with news media and other cultural factors. There is a need for more data, and I expect this project to be ongoing for the foreseeable future, but my overarching concern is that narratives which have evolved under the ostensible label “antiracist” are not scientifically validated and may have the paradoxical effect of worsening race issues when employed.



For instance, related to the issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts (DEI) employed in workplaces, schools, and universities, the evidence we have suggests that their efficacy is mixed (Kalev et al., 2006). In particular, programs which are ill-designed may paradoxically create backlash effects, reducing diversity and increasing racial resentment. I express the concern that we are heading into a period where such programs and initiatives, particularly those based in the Implicit Associations Test (IAT), Critical Race Theory (CRT) and concepts such as “White Fragility” which have either been proven to fail (IAT) or which have no reliable scientific evidence (CRT and “White Fragility”) are becoming trendy and possibly doing considerable harm to diversity, equality, and race relations.

To be clear, diversity programs which focus on helping people take perspective of others across differences (Bezrukova et al., 2016) or which focus on skills development (Lindsey et al., 2017) may be very helpful. Successful programs are typically voluntary (perhaps with incentives), have people from different backgrounds work together on tasks, foster on developing empathy, and treat individuals of all backgrounds with respect. By contrast, programs which separate individuals by ethnicity (reminiscent of segregation), employ polarizing language or suggest certain groups are morally superior to others (privilege, white fragility, etc.), tend to fail, often having paradoxical effects of making matters worse. In some cases, these approaches can promote race essentialism which can have negative repercussions (Wilton et al., 2018). This year, a group of 31 scholars wrote to the California State Board of Education expressing that education programs based in CRT were not well supported by scientific data demonstrating their effectiveness (Aarons et al., 2021). I agree with their concerns.

This is particularly evident for trainings involving the Implicit Association Test. Though very popular, evidence suggests that such trainings do not work. One of the larger efforts around implicit bias training has involved the New York Police Department’s investment of \$4.5 million to offer implicit bias training to police officers in hopes these might reduce racist incidents among officers. An empirical evaluation (Worden et al., 2020) of the training suggested that officers reported learning content but that it ultimately had little impact on actual officer behaviors.

My concern is that important pillars of society including education, health care, academia and news media have embraced a set of beliefs rooted in CRT that are ill-defined, unfalsifiable or poorly situated in data, and which do not faithfully represent the complex data on group outcomes in either the US or UK. I further express the concern that such approaches, though well-intentioned and ostensibly rooted in the language of justice are, instead, actively contributing to decreased welfare for all including for communities they are meant to represent.

Ultimately, we need better data, including examining diversity approaches through preregistered, open science, randomized controlled trials and these are currently few in number. But without this empirical platform, I worry we are about to indulge a vast moral experiment with uncertain outcome.

Cordially,

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